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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION: CHINA'S ANTI-SECESSION LAW, CROSS-STRAIT RELATIONS

11. Summary: All major Taiwan newspapers carried extensive coverage over the weekend of the massive protest in Taipei March 26 against China's new Anti-Secession Law. All Taiwan newspapers described the rally in front of Taipei's Presidential Office as a peaceful demonstration, although their reports on the number of participants differed dramatically. The centrist "China Times" ran eight pages of reports March 27 about the march, with a banner headline "Democracy, Peace, Protect Taiwan" on its front page. It also, however, ran another story about a Taiwan business leader's public support of a "One China" policy on its front page.

12. Tackling future cross-Straits relations following China's legislation of the Anti-Secession Law, Professor Chu Yun-han wrote in the centrist "China Times" March 28 that Taiwan has to choose between putting cross-Straits ties at a standstill or gradually moving toward negotiations. A "China Times" editorial March 27 called for harmony and reconciliation between two sides of the Taiwan Strait as being the next steps in cross-Straits relations. The pro-unification "United Daily News" pointed to a lack of policy on the part of President Chen Shui-bian as being the main cause for heightened cross-Straits tension. The English-language, pro-unification "China Post" urged both sides to cool down and to start cross-Straits dialogue. In the meantime, pro-independence "Liberty Times" and "Taiwan Daily" lauded the March 26 demonstration as a show of the Taiwan people's will. "Taipei Times," also a pro-independence newspaper, called for a curb on Taiwan investment in China. End summary.

A) "Limited Choices for Taiwan"

Chu Yun-han, a political science professor with National Taiwan University, commented in the "Weekly Review" column in the centrist, pro-status quo "China Times" [circulation: 600,000] (3/28):

"In response to Beijing's inclusion of 'non-peaceful means' in a law [meant] to suppress the Taiwan independence movement, leaders of the Democratic Progressive Party chose to hold a 'March 26 Protest against Anti-Secession Law' as their main campaign to counter China, while they have no plans to take stronger action for the sake of political confrontation. Not long ago, U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice used the low-key language of "not helpful" to express U.S. disapproval when commenting on the Anti-Secession Law. She also reiterated the U.S. stance by saying "both sides cannot unilaterally change the status quo" and "[The United States] encourages both sides to resume dialogue." The two models of responses have clearly mapped out the basic structure for the development of cross-Straits relations, and the limited political choices Taiwan faces under the framework set by the current situation.

"What really worries the United States is not the Anti-Secession Law itself, but the strategic judgmental ability demonstrated by the leaders of Hu Jintao's generation. The Anti-Secession law is just [part of] Beijing's demonstration of its strategic judgment, while the various military preparations by Beijing accompanying the Anti-Secession Law are a more important indicator [of it].

"Meanwhile, the United States has also worked hard under the table to help a meeting between [President] Chen Shui-bian and [PFP chairman] James Soong to materialize, and make the DPP government return firmly to keeping its promise to be on track with the existing constitution and the 'Five Nos' via the ten-point agreement. This political act, timed [to coincide with] the eve of the passage of the Anti-Secession Law, has taken the steam away from the boiling cross-Straits situation on the one hand, and also cleanses Taipei's name as being a troublemaker on the other hand.

"After the excitement of the March 26 rally fades, Taiwan still has to adjust practically to the restraint which grows

more clear and firmly restricting as time goes by. In the foreseeable future, Taiwan basically has only two choices left, with the first one being 'stalling and refraining from breaking the ice' and the second 'heading slowing toward negotiations.' Under the first option, Taiwan would still refuse to cross the threshold of 'recognizing the 1992 Consensus' set up by Beijing. The formal channel for cross-Straight negotiation would still be closed, the military standoff would continue, there would still be endless wars on the diplomatic battlefield, and the normalization of cross-Straight economic and trade relations would still be far away with no time set for completion. But the trend of Taiwan's growing economic dependence on China would not change, and Taiwan's bleeding economy would not be remedied. Meanwhile, although those who propound independence can still subjectively maintain the space for imagining 'Taiwan still has independence as an option,' though objectively 'de jure Taiwan independence' would be killed off. Therefore there would still be political impulses within Taiwan to challenge this bottom line, the momentum for mobilization [for the cause of independence] would ebb away, and the high tension between the two sides can come under control.

"Under the second choice, Taiwan's mainstream opinion would return to the fundamental consensus of 'one China under the Constitution,' and the public would be willing to respond to Beijing's prerequisite of [accepting] 'One China' on this basis. The mechanism for cross-Straight negotiations will restart, and the administrative negotiations would gradually resume.

"Chen Shui-bian's willingness to sign the ten-point joint statement with James Soong, his statement on 'quit deceiving ourselves and others' in response to the pro-independence activists' keen promotion of the making of a new constitution and for name rectification, together with his choice of limited political rebuttal after the passage of the Anti-Secession Law show that he admits the existence of the [restricting] framework. Meanwhile, Premier Frank Hsieh delivered a discourse on 'one China under the Constitution' when he first took up the premiership, plus Chen Shui-bian also committed himself to the promise of resuming negotiations [with Beijing] on the basis of the achievements reached in the Hong Kong talk [in 1992] when he recently held a video conference with members of the European media and of parliament -- these gestures seem to reveal that Chen Shui-bian is inclined to walk out of the political and economic predicaments imposed by the first option, and try out the way paved out by the second option.

"Judging from the angle of this broad situation, the March 26 rally may not necessarily be the beginning of a new round of political friction and standoff for cross-Straight relations, but can be a start for a new stage for trying out political reconciliation."

B) "Taiwan Should Move toward Ethnic Harmony and Push for Cross-Straight Reconciliation After the [March 26] March"

The centrist, pro-status quo "China Times" [circulation: 600,000] editorialized (3/27):

". The March 26 rally stimulated by the Anti-Secession Law is absolutely a necessary response, but the next step [for Taiwan] should not be endless demonstrations, and should never be conversion to Taiwan independence, which will be used by China as an excuse for China to adopt non-peaceful measures according to the Anti-Secession Law.

"To take this a step further, demonstrations must not only stop right now, but we should get rid of passion, retrieve rationality, suspend political mobilization, and let people take a rest. [The government] should dissolve internal confrontations, and plan for Taiwan's external space that will not be suppressed or threatened in order to create a favorable environment for survival and development. ."

C) "March without Speech: A Classic of Populism That Highlights 'Movement without Policy'"

The conservative, pro-unification "United Daily News" commented in an editorial [circulation: 600,000] (3/27):

". The Anti-Secession Law can be viewed as the temporary conclusion of cross-Straight interactions [that have taken place] over more than the past ten years, and the [March 26] march as the end of several trials of Taiwan independence from the statement of 'state-to-state' relations to the names-change plan and constitutional reform. Over more than ten years, due to the thrust of Taiwan independence, constitutional reform was controlled by a foreign nation, legislation through a referendum was blocked by a foreign nation, a defensive referendum was distorted by foreign interference. The names-change plan and constitutional reform obtained nothing but much cry and little wool. [Taiwan's] sovereignty has been suppressed several times,

and the constitutional structure is equivalent to being supervised by a foreign country. The leader of the ruling party should definitely bear all responsibility (for this), however, he has adopted populism and has summoned millions of people to demonstrate and cover up for his guilt. The same scenario applies to the situation [where] Mainland Affairs Council officials attend a demonstration when there is no progress on cross-Strait relations; Ministry of Foreign Affairs officials also attend a demonstration when Taiwan's diplomatic position in the world is in the soup; Ministry of Economic Affairs officials also attend a demonstration when cross-Strait trade is in the cart. At the critical moment, the ruling class of the country did not carry out reflection, but tried their best to go to the streets and attend a demonstration. Is this solemn and stirring or just absurd?"

D) "March Showed the Will of Taiwan"

The pro-independence, "Liberty Times" [circulation: 800,000] editorialized (3/27):

"On the surface, China's enactment of the 'Anti-Secession' Law targets the 'Taiwan independence forces.' In reality, anyone who rejects unification is part of the 'Taiwan independence forces.'

"However, many moderate voters and grassroots members of the pan-blue camp participated in the march yesterday. This explains why the majority of the Taiwanese people have come to realize that the threat against Taiwan draws no distinctions between pan-green and pan-blue camps.

"Regardless how people may differ in terms of political ideologies, Taiwan must fight off the imposition of Chinese hegemony first. The direction of the popular will in Taiwan is very clear - to protect the right to self-determination."

E) The pro-independence "Taiwan Daily" [circulation: 150,000] editorialized (3/27):

". Yesterday's March for Democracy and Peace to Protect Taiwan, which was massive and ended peacefully, fully demonstrated the mainstream public opinion in Taiwan society - that is, the more unreasonably China suppresses Taiwan, the more strongly Taiwanese people will demonstrate their awareness of Taiwanese sovereignty.

"President Chen Shui-bian, who led his family out on the streets, should use popular opinion as his endorsement to rebuke China when the Chinese government tries to suppress Taiwan unreasonably again. We believe that international society, which belongs to the camp of democracy, will also understand and support President Chen's judgment . ."

F) "Time to Cool Down"

The conservative, pro-unification, English-language "China Post" [circulation: 30,000] observed in an editorial (3/27):

"Clearly, the people of Taiwan are not willing to sacrifice their sovereignty and independence in exchange for vague promises of a better future from the other side of the Taiwan Strait.

"The vast majority of people also strongly object to Beijing's obstinate insistence on its 'right' to use military force against us in the event we do something that offends mainland China's communist leadership. Now that the people of Taiwan have let their voices be heard on this issue, it is our hope that things will calm down quickly before any more damage is done.

"Since mainland Chinese President Hu Jintao has already publicly stated that Beijing is willing to meet and talk with representatives of all major political parties in Taiwan, we recommend that the next step should be opening such dialogues as soon as possible."

G) "Time to Curb Investment in China"

The pro-independence, English-language "Taipei Times" [circulation: 30,000] editorialized (3/28):

"Sustainable corporate management means moving on from contract manufacturing to concentrate on research and development, innovation and developing brand marketing. That is the only way for Taiwanese companies to compete in the world market. Investment in China runs counter to that goal, since it gives paramount importance to cheap labor and land while ignoring R&D, innovation and brand marketing. Relying only on price will lead to cutthroat competition and disappearing profits.

"Taiwanese investment in China is a slow form of suicide for our industrial base and the economy as a whole. China's 'Anti-Secession' Law is a visible threat, while investment in

that country is a less tangible one. Unrestrained investment in China simply prepares us for the slaughter.."

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